

JAMES OBERWETTER'S SELECTION TO BE U.S. AMBASSADOR TO SAUDI ARABIA

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I am deeply disappointed by the President's choice of James Oberwetter to be the next U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia. My disappointment does not stem from doubts about Mr. Oberwetter's integrity or professional accomplishment. Indeed, in both categories he has my respect and admiration. However, I simply do not believe that Mr. Oberwetter possesses the proper experience to assume what has become one of the most important posts in our Nation's fight against terrorism. And while I will not stand in the way of Mr. Oberwetter's appointment, I believe it is important that the record show that the President's choice could certainly have been better.

Saudi Arabia is one of the primary battlegrounds in the war on terror. This is not simply because 15 of the 19 hijackers from 9/11 were Saudi. Top anti-terror officials tell us that Saudi Arabia is also a hub for terrorist financing and extremist incitement. The inflammatory content of its educational textbooks promotes anti-American sentiment in the Kingdom and its support for extremist madrassas schools in Pakistan, southeast Asia and Africa gives life to institutions that are incubators for the next generation of terrorists abroad.

Given this sad state of affairs, there are several reasons why Mr. Oberwetter should not be our nation's next Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. First, he has absolutely no official diplomatic or anti-terror experience. As I have said many times before, we live in a post-9/11 world where the old rules simply do not apply. Given that Saudi Arabia is one of the most important fronts in the war on terror, our top representative there can no longer be a run-of-the mill political appointee; rather, the American Ambassador to Saudi Arabia must be a seasoned diplomatic expert and someone with an extensive background in combating terrorist financing and religious extremism.

Mr. Oberwetter's more than 25 years as an oil industry insider provide him with no background to assume this key position in the fight against terrorism. Indeed, his oil industry pedigree is another reason why he is an inappropriate choice to serve as Ambassador. While I have no doubts about Mr. Oberwetter's personal integrity, his proximity to the oil industry suggests that commercial rather than security interests appear to have taken precedence in the administration's decision-making.

I simply do not understand this business-as-usual approach to diplomatic appointments when American lives are at stake. Surely there is someone more qualified than an oil executive that we could choose from the distinguished ranks of our Nation's diplomatic and security corps to occupy this impor-

tant post in the war on terror. Mr. Oberwetter's nomination is a dis-appointment and does a disservice to our national security.

ON YESTERDAY'S ATTACK IN MOSUL

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I express my outrage at events that transpired this weekend in Iraq. No one expects terrorists to follow the rules, but what they did to two soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division this weekend in Mosul is beyond the pale. We have lost 431 men and women in the conflict in Iraq; my heart goes out to the families and friends of each and every one.

Here is how the Associated Press describes what happened, as reported in *The Tennessean* and a number of other papers across the country:

Iraqi teenagers dragged two bloodied 101st Airborne soldiers from a wrecked vehicle and pummeled them with concrete blocks yesterday, witnesses said . . .

Witnesses to the Mosul attack said gunmen shot two soldiers driving through the city center, sending their vehicle crashing into a wall. The 101st Airborne Division said the soldiers were driving to another garrison.

About a dozen swarming teenagers dragged the soldiers out of the wreckage and beat them with concrete blocks, the witnesses said.

"They lifted a block and hit them with it on the face," Younis Mahmoud, 19, said.

It was unknown whether the soldiers were alive or dead when pulled from the wreckage.

That is what the Associated Press wrote. I ask unanimous consent the article be printed in full in the *RECORD* following my remarks.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. ALEXANDER. One can't help but feel a sense of anger when reading a story like that. CSM Jerry Wilson and SP Rel Ravago were on their way from one garrison to another. The terrorists laid waiting for the soldiers to drive by, and ambushed them. Even worse, they made every effort to be as brutal and bloody as possible. It makes me sick to my stomach.

At the same time, we also remember how many of our troops have lost their lives in this struggle. 431 men and women from our Armed Forces have given their lives since Operation Iraqi Freedom commenced. Forty-eight of them were from the 101st Airborne, based in Fort Campbell on the border of Kentucky and Tennessee. 2,067 have been wounded overall. And as much as we all wish it weren't the case, more will follow.

Nothing can prepare you for the loss of a loved one, especially loved ones as young as those that are serving our country in Iraq. We can only hope the knowledge that these soldiers died fighting to keep us safe will provide some comfort in this time of grief. To those families, we can only say this: the hopes and prayers of a grateful nation are with you.

But in the midst of this sorrow, we must remember why our troops are in Iraq. We must strengthen our resolve. Iraq is freer today than it has been for more than a generation. An evil dictator has been toppled, his regime is gone. The people of Iraq, by and large, are grateful; according to polls, the vast majority of them support continued American presence in their country.

In fact, in the horrible incident involving the two soldiers in Mosul, U.S. troops were alerted to the attack by sympathetic Iraqis.

We are making progress in Iraq: the power is on, schools are re-opened, markets are buzzing, the southern port is open. But danger lurks.

And we must labor on. A stable, democratic Iraq in the midst of the Middle East could become our greatest ally in the War on Terror. It would change the world. But if we give up and throw in the towel, an unstable Iraq would quickly become a hotbed of terrorism far worse than Afghanistan. The stakes are high. Failure is not an option.

Our troops and their families bear the burden of this cause more than any other. Their sacrifice will never be forgotten.

In a few days, we will celebrate Thanksgiving. In the first Thanksgiving proclamation, President George Washington "recommend[ed] to the people of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God, as a people, with devout reverence and affectionate gratitude."

Ours is a blessed nation, and we have much to be grateful for. This Thanksgiving we should be especially grateful for the men and women of our Armed Forces, fighting the terrorists over there so fewer can attack us here, at home. Whether helping to open a new school in Kirkuk or securing the area around Baghdad International Airport; our troops are standing in harms way. They are doing it for us.

For thousands of families, the Thanksgiving table will have an empty space this year. It will be hard. We should all save a place in our hearts for those military families this Thanksgiving. We give thanks for their courage, too.

So today, I say thank you to the men and women of our Armed Forces. We stand in awe of your strength. We are humbled by your sacrifice. We are grateful for your courage.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the *RECORD*, as follows:

[From the *TENNESSEAN*, Nov. 24, 2003]

TWO 101ST SOLDIERS DIE IN AMBUSH

MOSUL, IRAQ—Iraqi teenagers dragged two bloodied 101st Airborne soldiers from a wrecked vehicle and pummeled them with concrete blocks yesterday, witnesses said, describing the killings as a burst of savagery in a city once safe for Americans.

Another soldier was killed by a bomb, and a U.S.-allied police chief was assassinated.

The U.S.-led coalition also said it grounded commercial flights after the military confirmed that a missile struck a DHL cargo plane that landed Saturday at Baghdad International Airport with its wing aflame.

Nevertheless, American officers insisted they were making progress in bringing stability to Iraq, and the U.S.-appointed Governing Council named an ambassador to Washington—an Iraqi-American woman who spent the past decade lobbying U.S. lawmakers to promote democracy in her homeland.

Witnesses to the Mosul attack said gunmen shot two soldiers driving through the city center, sending their vehicle crashing into a wall. The 101st Airborne Division said the soldiers were driving to another garrison.

About a dozen swarming teenagers dragged the soldiers out of the wreckage and beat them with concrete blocks, the witnesses said. "They lifted a block and hit them with it on the face," Younis Mahmoud, 19, said. It was unknown whether the soldiers were alive or dead when pulled from the wreckage.

Initial reports said the soldiers' throats were cut. But another witness, teenager Bahaa Jassim, said the wounds appeared to have come from bullets. "One of the soldiers was shot under the chin, and the bullet came out of his head. I saw the hole in his helmet. The other was shot in the throat," Jassim said.

Some people looted the vehicle of weapons, CDs and a backpack, Jassim said. "They remained there for over an hour without the Americans knowing anything about it," he said. "I . . . went and told other troops."

Television footage showed the soldiers' bodies played on the ground as U.S. troops secured the area. One victim's foot appeared to have been severed.

The frenzy recalled the October 1993 scene in Somalia, when locals dragged the bodies of Marines killed in fighting with warlords through the streets.

In Baqouba, just north of Baghdad, insurgents detonated a roadside bomb as a 4th Infantry Division convoy passed, killing one soldier and wounding two others, the military said.

In Baghdad, Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt confirmed the Mosul deaths but would not provide details. "We're not going to get ghoulish about it," he said.

The savagery of the attack was unusual for Mosul, once touted as a success story in sharp contrast to the anti-American violence seen in Sunni Muslim areas north and west of Baghdad.

In recent weeks, however, attacks against U.S. troops have increased in Mosul, raising concerns that the insurgency is spreading. Simultaneously, attacks have accelerated against Iraqis considered to be supporting Americans—such as policemen and politicians working for the interim Iraqi administration.

Yesterday gunmen killed the Iraqi police chief of Latifiyah, 20 miles south of Baghdad, and his bodyguard and driver, American and Iraqi officials said. No more details were released. The assassination occurred one day after suicide bombers struck two police stations northeast of Baghdad within 30 minutes, killing at least 14 people. Gunmen Saturday also killed an Iraqi police colonel protecting oil installations in Mosul.

In Samara, about 75 miles north of Baghdad, Iraqi police said six U.S. Apache helicopter gunships blasted marshland after four rocket-propelled grenades were fired at the American military garrison at the city's northern end. One Iraqi passer-by was killed in the air attack, police said.

In Kirkuk, 150 miles north of Baghdad, a bomb exploded at an oil compound, injuring three American civilian contractors from the U.S. firm Kellogg Brown & Root. The three suffered facial cuts from flying glass, U.S. Lt. Col. Matt Croke said. KBR, a subsidiary of Halliburton, also has a significant presence at Baghdad's Palestine Hotel, which was rocketed by insurgents Friday, wounding one civilian. "We all know that Americans are being threatened," Croke said.

Kimmitt told reporters in Baghdad that witnesses saw two surface-to-air missiles fired Saturday at a cargo plane operated by the Belgium-based package service DHL as it left for Bahrain. The plane was the first civilian airliner hit by insurgents, who have shot down many military helicopters with shoulder-fired rockets. The coalition authority ordered DHL and Royal Jordanian, the only commercial passenger airline flying into Baghdad, to suspend flights.

Despite the ongoing violence, U.S. officials said the occupation was going well. "If you look at the accomplishments of the coalition since March of this year, it has been enormous," Marine Gen. Peter Pace, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said in Tikrit. He is touring Afghanistan and Iraq.

Despite the surge in the scope and ferocity of the attacks, Kimmitt dismissed any threat posed by the guerrillas, whom he described as occasionally clever but overall "a pretty poor group of insurgents."

"We have nothing at this point that causes us to be concerned," he said. "This is not an enemy that can defeat us militarily."

Also yesterday, Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari said veteran Washington lobbyist Rend Rahim Francke was appointed Iraq's ambassador to the United States. Francke, an Iraq native who has spent most of her life abroad, led the Iraq Foundation, a Washington-based pro-democracy group and has helped plan Iraq's transition from Saddam Hussein's rule. The appointment will renew the diplomatic ties between Washington and Baghdad severed in 1990 when Saddam invaded Kuwait.

EMPLOYEE FREE CHOICE ACT

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, on Friday, I was pleased to introduce the Employee Free Choice Act, which is sponsored by 24 Members of the Senate.

For decades, labor unions have led the fight for the 8-hour day, and the 40-hour week, for overtime pay, for the minimum wage, for safe and healthy workplaces, for health insurance, for retirement security, and many other basic rights. Millions of union members in communities across America benefit today from the long hard battles of the past.

Union workers earn wages 25 percent higher than nonunion workers. Union workers are more than four times as likely to have a secure pension plan. Union workers are 40 percent more likely to have health insurance coverage.

These and many other longstanding benefits of union membership are undisputed. But too many workers who want to be members of a union are unable to do so. The reason is clear. Too often, employers discourage it in any way they can.

For years, illegal employer tactics have been common whenever employees attempt to form a union. Each

year, employers are charged with over 20,000 instances of violating workplace labor rights. In over half of these claims, a worker was punished or even fired for union activity. A recent survey found that employers illegally fire employees in one quarter of all union organizing drives.

Even employees who manage to form a union often can't get a contract, because employers refuse to bargain. Only half of the unions who win an election are able to get a first contract.

Often, companies hire expensive consultants and launch campaigns to intimidate workers and keep them from supporting a union.

Anti-union companies often give their managers pamphlets with titles like "A Manager's Toolbox to Remaining Union Free."

They close down departments that succeed in unionizing. Employers spy on workers and use one-on-one confrontations to intimidate workers or break the union.

Too often, Federal labor laws intended to protect workers from coercion have no teeth. If workers are fired, they may not get their jobs back for years. At most, the employer will owe back wages. Companies treat such payments as just another cost of doing business.

America's workers deserve better. American democracy deserves better.

That is why we are here today to introduce the Employee Free Choice Act. Free Choice means: the freedom to associate freely in the workplace; the freedom to choose your own labor representative; and the freedom to bargain for better wages, better health care, and other benefits.

Our bill recognizes a specific right of workers to choose a union through a process called a card check. If a majority of employees sign a card asking for representation by a union, the employer must comply.

The bill also requires employers to come to the table to negotiate a first contract. And it levels the playing field for employees who are attempting to organize a union or obtain a first contract. It provides for court orders to stop employers from firing or threatening these workers. The bill also puts real teeth in the law by strengthening the penalties in current law for workers that support a union.

These protections are long overdue. For too long, we have acquiesced in the anti-labor, anti-worker, anti-union tactics that are far too prevalent in the workplace. We like to think that workers are free to join a union, but too often that basic aspect of freedom is denied in our modern society, because hard-line corporate managers succeed in denying a fair choice by workers.

At a critical time like this when we are fighting for the basic freedoms of other peoples in other lands, we cannot fail to take a stand for the basic freedoms of the millions of American workers who depend on us to protect their rights at home.